

Sermon 87, At Court and In Court, Proverbs 25:1-15

Proposition: Yet another picture of the Wise Son — this one highlighting His role in the executive and judicial sectors of society as the perfect courtier and the perfect plaintiff.

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Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, we see another picture of the Wise Son this morning. This one highlights His role at court, as the perfect courtier, and in court, as the perfect plaintiff.

I. Proverbs, Section 5: More Proverbs of Solomon, v. 1

The rest of the introduction properly belongs under the exposition of the first verse of our text. The text informs us that we are in a new section of Proverbs. Like the previous section, this section is chary of the name of God and mentions Him far less often than Proverbs as a whole. It also consists almost entirely of synthetic rather than antithetic proverbs. Furthermore, it only contrasts the righteous and the wicked in two verses — v. 5 and v. 26 of the present chapter. Those are some of the general characteristics of this fifth section of the book.

A. Written by Solomon

Like sections 1 and 2, but unlike 3-4 and 6-7, this section consists of Solomon's own work. These are some of the 3000 proverbs which he spoke.

B. Transcribed by Hezekiah's Men

But it does not present the proverbs as he arranged them, but as they were copied or transcribed by scribes working for King Hezekiah. Just as Hezekiah renewed worship by looking to the psalms of David, so he renewed the spiritual life of Judah by looking to the proverbs of Solomon. In other words, he reached into the fairly remote past and found the word of God there. Then he deployed it in the life of God's people. Thus, precedent for what we're doing right now can be found in Hezekiah's practice. He looked to the proverbs for spiritual edification and made them available for the people of God.

Do you do this for your family? Solomon came up with the proverbs — but do you share them with your family? You don't have to have the wisdom of Solomon to appropriate the wisdom of Solomon. The great king of Israel has already done most of the work for you — giving you motivation and leaving you without excuse.

II. Wisdom at Court, vv. 2-7

Well, what is the content of this first part of the Hezekian collection of Proverbs? It deals with wisdom at the royal court, wisdom in the law court, and the promise of wise speech.

A. God Conceals, Kings Investigate, v. 2

We begin with a memorable proverb about divine-human relations. God conceals things. We call the attempt to find out what He has hidden "science." We call it "history." We call it "philosophy." We call it "anthropology." We call it "philosophy." Brothers and sisters, every human discipline, insofar as it involves penetrating to the nature of things and learning not only the what but the why and the how, is an exercise of our kingly office with Christ! God hid trillions upon trillions of "easter eggs" in nature, history, providence, and our own bodies — and it's our job to find them. Where would the glory of human science be if God had simply created a Wikipedia for us so that when we said, "I wonder how geese mate?" we only needed to ask our phone instead of actually going out and watching them do it?

So praise God that it is hard to learn science, history, anthropology, and the rest of the disciplines. He glories in making those truths hard to dig out. And He simultaneously glorifies us with the honor of discovery.

B. Kings Are Divinely Inscrutable, v. 3

We have learned a lot about the heavens with the use of large telescopes that look at many different pieces of the electromagnetic spectrum. But there is still much we don't know about the deep parts of the earth. God has hidden them well, and it will take kings and their well-funded teams of scientists a long time to figure them out. But do you know what's every bit as tough as investigating the earth's mantle and core? Investigating the king's heart. This is preeminently true when it comes to the heart of Christ the king. Oh, we know that His heart is kind and loving. But His acts of providence routinely puzzle us. Why does He send plagues on the earth? Why does He let so-and-so get away with horrible sins, while giving some good person a nasty life? Brothers and sisters, the bottom line is that we cannot pry into God's business and we can't pry into the king's either. God does not account for His choices to us, and the king doesn't either.

C. Kings Need to Investigate and Fire the Wicked, vv. 4-5

Rather, we are accountable to the king. The king searches things out. And what he especially searches out is the guilt or innocence of those around him. You can state positively what these verses say, which is that the king is comparable to a silver refiner whose job is to get the impurities out and therefore that he needs to have good people in his cabinet. But the text states it negatively. It says that the king needs to fire the wicked. Get them out! David said in Psalm 101 that he would not tolerate a wicked man in his court, and Solomon now says the same thing. For a king to have his throne established in righteousness requires that he purge impurities out of his administration. Good policies can't be enforced by bad men.

That's a hard word to hear in this age of the technocrat. But it is fundamentally important that we pay attention to it. We dream of "systems so perfect that no one will need to be good." But the fact is that the best kings and the best policies can't work in a system run by evil people.

How does the Lord Jesus fire the wicked? Here on earth, it's through the exercise of church discipline. Those who practice evil without repentance and shame need to be expelled from the body of the church. A man who beats his wife and insults his daughters should be disciplined and, if he won't repent, be excommunicated. A pastor who preaches falsehoods or fails to shepherd God's people needs to be removed from pastoring and perhaps even from the church. And so on. Obviously in Heaven the Lord Jesus doesn't have any wicked courtiers. But here on earth, He has plenty.

D. Be Humble before the King, vv. 6-7

Many of those wicked courtiers have the particular failing mentioned here — the love of glory and self-aggrandizement. Brothers and sisters, this is all over the church of Jesus Christ. Most of us do it mentally. We think to ourselves how much better we are than so-and-so, and how we can't believe that he has such a gross failing in that area over there or this area over here. We mentally pat ourselves on the back, preening ourselves on how wonderful we are in so many different and absurd ways. But guess what? If you let yourself think it for too long, soon you'll start to believe it and act on it. And when you do, you will actually attempt to take a place that's too honorable for you, one for which you're not fitted. I well remember the man who came to talk to my pastor when I was interning some years ago. He said he really felt burdened to preach on college campuses. My pastor asked him if he ever read the Bible to his own family. He admitted that he didn't. Well then, the pastor wanted to know, what made him think that he was qualified to teach strangers when he wasn't even discipling his own children? Brothers and sisters, this particular sin of arrogance frequently manifests itself within the church by a desire to be up front. Now, it's not evil to be up front in a church, he said while standing up front in a church. But if you want to be up here because of the prestige, you should not be up here. If I want to be up here because of the prestige, I shouldn't be up here either! If you thrust yourself forward to a place where you don't belong, Christ can and will demote you back to where you need to be. He has busted many a pastor back down to the rank of private Christian. He has

busted many a dad, many a mom, many a colonel and college president. Promotion comes from God — and so does demotion.

So do you think you ought to be an office-bearer in this church? The Lord will make that clear through the voice of His people without your political machinations. Do you think you ought to have a wife? The Lord will give you one when you're ready and not before. Do you think that you ought to be getting a promotion and a raise at work? The Lord has umpteen promotions and raises ready to go. He'll give you one just as soon as it's beneficial for you. Stop angling to be rich! Jesus didn't play politics in order to get Himself a less splintery cross.

III. Wisdom in Court, vv. 8-10

Well, the wisdom that you ought to show as a courtier, and that Christ shows as King, applies as well to the wisdom that you ought to show in the law-courts. There, you need to remember two major points.

A. Be Slow to File Suit, v. 8

The first thing to know about going to court is: Don't go to court. Going to court is a really bad idea. Drag your feet. Be as slow as possible to go and argue your case. After all, you might lose. Christ is not sue-happy. Life is not about winning legal arguments and getting the might of the civil authorities to back you up and say that you're right.

B. Never Reveal a Confidence, vv. 9-10

But the other major point, whether you're formally going to court or just having a private argument, is that you must never reveal a confidence. If you know something about someone that they wouldn't want spread, then keep it to yourself. If you drag their name into your argument, your reproach will never be wiped away. You will be known from then on as someone untrustworthy.

Now, think for a moment about all the things that you've told Jesus that you've never told anyone else. Has a single one of them ever gotten back around to you? Have you ever heard that Jesus told someone else your secret? I didn't think so. He is as silent as the tomb. He never tells anyone any story but their own. And you and I need to imitate Him, for that is the path of wisdom. Remember the Golden Rule. This command not to reveal secrets is an obvious extension of the Golden Rule. If you wouldn't want anyone to reveal your secret, then you shouldn't reveal anyone's secret. Christ never reveals other people's secrets.

IV. Wisdom in Speech, vv. 11-15

Well, even outside the context of court, wisdom manifests itself primarily through the tongue. What are the characteristics of wise speech?

A. It's Beautiful, vv. 11-12

First of all, it's beautiful. A word at the proper time is as lovely as art produced from the precious metals gold and silver, which are lovely in themselves and get more lovely when handled by an expert metalworker. In particular, what's lovely is a rebuke. It's like an earring. That's the metaphor here. The best way to dress up your ears is not by buying expensive jewelry, but by listening when you're rebuked. Now that is beautiful — an ear that can take correction.

Do you have such an ear? The wise son did and does. He didn't need to be rebuked for doing the wrong thing, but He was rebuked on our account. "Reproaches have broken my heart, so that I am in despair. I looked for pity, but there was none, and for comforters, but I found none" (Psa 69:20). Jesus was rebuked not for doing evil, but for doing good! And the greatest ornament He now bears is the five bleeding wounds He got dying in our place.

Of course, for most of us, rebuke tells us when we were wrong. But if rebuke even of one who was right can be an ornament to His ear, surely heeding rebuke when we're wrong can be an ornament to us! It's not easy to be rebuked. But it is surely necessary. We can only learn to do it by cultivating the humility that comes from spending time with Christ.

B. It's Refreshing, vv. 13

But wise words are not only ornamental; they are as refreshing as an ice-cold drink when you're working hard to get the harvest in. Do you find wise words refreshing like this? When you listen to David Suchet reading scripture, does it just refresh your whole being? Does the refreshment it brings make you realize how dried up you were without it?

A faithful messenger speaks the truth and is refreshing. Jesus is the faithful witness who spoke the truth and refreshed His Father. Will you imitate Him? Will you strive to learn and speak the truth?

C. Its Lack Is Heartbreaking, v. 14

The lack of wise speech is heartbreaking. It's as bad as seeing the sky overcast and longing for rain, but then watching all the clouds blow away and not getting a single drop of rain. It's just heartbreaking. That's what a promised gift that never materializes is like. That's what an untrustworthy messenger is like.

Dads, do you tell the truth? Husbands, when you say "Honey, you're the only one I have eyes for," are you saying what's factually correct? Children, when you say, "Yes, I cleaned my room and it is clean enough to pass inspection," are you telling the truth? You may not be, dads, husbands, children. Wives, if you say "Everything's fine," are you telling the truth? Lack of truth is heartbreaking!

D. It's Persuasive, v. 15

But wise speech is not only refreshing and needed. It's persuasive. One quality of wise speech is that it's gentle. Christ was kind to the evil and ungrateful, just like His Father.

How do you learn patience and gentleness? They are fruits of the Spirit. You will only grow them by courting the Holy Spirit in your life — by praying for Him, welcoming Him, and not grieving Him.

Do you love the Wise Son when you see Him portrayed like this? Do you want to be like Him, at His court and in His courtroom? I trust that you do. His mouth is most sweet, and He is altogether lovely. Amen.